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CLINICAL FACILITY UTILIZATION BY ARIZONA NURSING PROGRAMS

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The nursing shortage and a legislative mandate to formulate a plan to double nursing program graduates in Arizona (S.B. 1260) has led to the rapid expansion of existing nursing programs and the establishment of new nursing programs in Arizona. This rapid expansion in the number of nursing students has led to increased numbers of students being placed in existing health care facilities for clinical experiences. Shortages of appropriate clinical placements and an inability to accommodate new programs have been reported by both clinical facilities and educational programs. In order to obtain baseline data regarding the usage of clinical facilities, the Education Committee of the Arizona State Board of Nursing conducted a survey of all approved pre-licensure nursing programs in the state to determine their clinical requirements. Programs were asked how many patient care hours students spent in each of 9 specialty areas: basic medical-surgical, advanced medical-surgical, geriatric, pediatric, psychiatric, maternity, community health, preceptorship, and other. Participants were also requested to designate the type of health care facility utilized for each specialty area: acute care, other facility based (e.g. long-term care, hospice, assisted living), or community (e.g. clinic, physician's office, home health, school).

All pre-licensure nursing programs offering both classroom and clinical instruction in Arizona were surveyed. One LPN program and one diploma RN program did not respond (n=21). One program reported two nursing tracks with differing clinical hours. All responses were verified with the reporting educational programs and revisions were made. Data was received between May, 2005 and November, 2005.

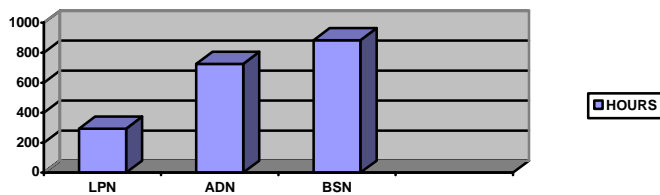
In interpreting these data, it is important to remember that patient care hours do not include hours spent in a nursing skills lab honing clinical skills or hours spent in simulation. These experiences are important to enhancing a student's nursing education but do not place a demand on clinical facilities and therefore are not within the scope of this survey. Patient care hours, as measured in this survey, are a quantification of patient care time and do not include other variables influencing the quality of the clinical experience such as the activities engaged in, the student responsibilities, the amount and type of supervision, the patient population, and the availability of the instructor and staff. Therefore, these data must be interpreted cautiously in comparing programs using patient care hours as a measure of quality, especially when differences are minimal.

RESULTS

TOTAL PATIENT CARE HOURS

The reporting programs currently have over 4000 (4191) nursing students participating in patient care experiences in Arizona. The average patient care hours among all nursing programs is 720. When the data is separated by type of nursing education (practical, associate degree, and baccalaureate) the data becomes more meaningful. Practical nursing program patient care hours range from 284-312 with a mean of 294. Patient care hours in associate degree nursing programs range from 521 to 1048 with a mean of 743 hours. Baccalaureate program patient care hours range from 365 to 1158 with a mean of 901 clinical hours. It is important to note that the one baccalaureate program that reported a significantly lower number of patient care hours (365) is a non-traditional program that requires all students be practicing LPNs upon entry. All other BSN programs accept students without a background in health care. Patient care hours in traditional baccalaureate nursing programs range from 862 to 1158 with a mean of 968. These data refute a commonly repeated belief that associate degree nursing programs provide more patient care experiences than baccalaureate nursing programs.

MEAN PATIENT CARE HOURS BY PROGRAM TYPE

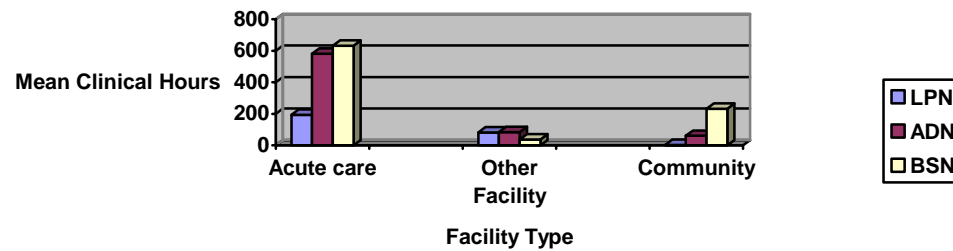


PATIENT CARE HOURS DISTRIBUTION ACROSS SETTINGS

The data were then analyzed according to program type (e.g. LPN, Associate Degree RN, and Baccalaureate RN) and type of patient care setting (e.g. acute care, other facility based, and community). For every type of program, the majority of patient care hours are in acute care facilities. Practical nursing programs have about one-fourth of their patient care experiences in non-acute care facilities, mainly long term care. Baccalaureate programs have approximately one-fourth of their patient care experiences in community based settings, mainly in community health. Associate degree programs have few hours in settings other than acute care. The major use of non-acute care facilities for associate degree and baccalaureate programs are in the specialty areas of basic medical surgical,

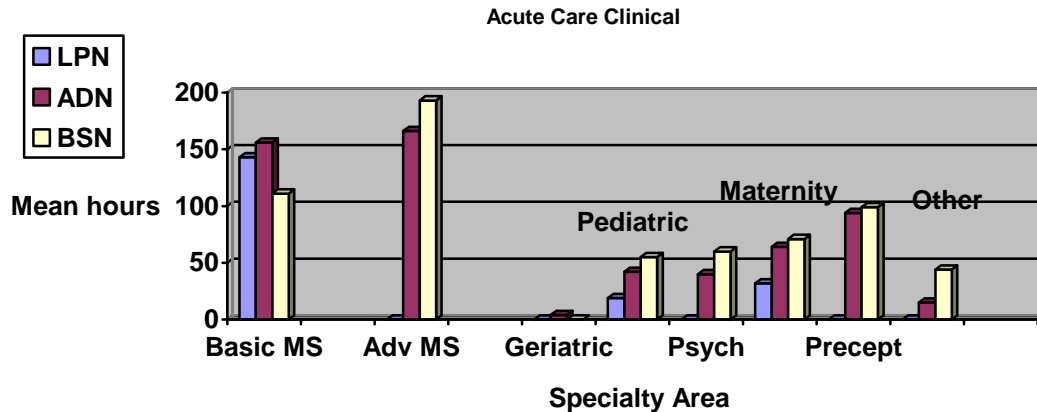
geriatrics, community health, and psych-mental health.

Mean Clinical Hours by Type of Program and Facility Type



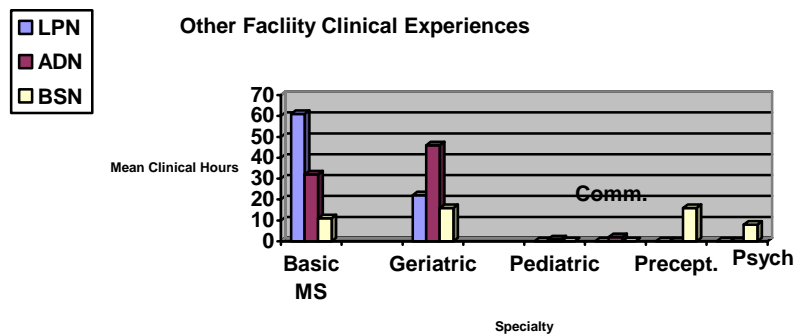
ACUTE CARE PATIENT CARE HOURS

Placements are reported to be scarce in acute care settings, especially during daytime hours and mid-week. Students in all programs spend an average of 540 hours in acute care clinical settings. LPN students spend average of 194 hours in acute care settings with the overwhelming majority of those hours in basic medical surgical (143) followed by maternity (32) and pediatrics (19). Associate degree nursing students spend an average of 539 hours in acute care settings. The largest amount of time is spent in advanced medical surgical (166) followed closely by basic medical surgical (156). The other areas in descending order are preceptorship (94), maternity (64), pediatric (42), psychiatric (40), other (14), and geriatric (4). Baccalaureate students spend an average of 616 hours in acute care clinical settings. The largest amount of hours are in advanced medical-surgical areas (193) followed by basic medical surgical (111), preceptorship (99), maternity (71), psychiatric (60), pediatric (55), and other (44). It is not surprising that no geriatric hours were reported in acute care since this experience would be more easily obtained in a long-term care facility. Even though the areas of pediatrics and psych/mental health do not represent the greatest demand, many programs report difficulty obtaining patient care experiences in these areas due to a limited supply of these types of units in acute care facilities. The lowered number of hours in these areas may be due to the limited supply.



OTHER FACILITY PATIENT CARE HOURS

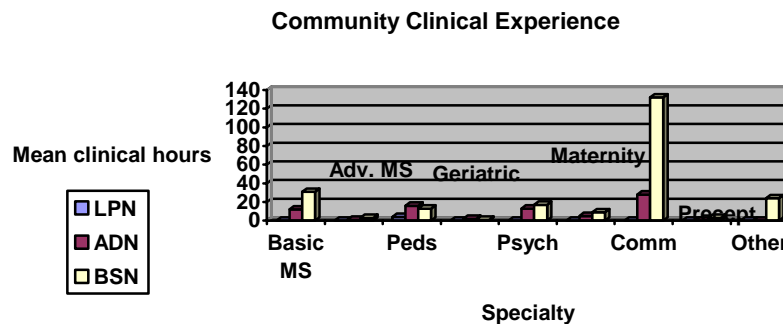
Nursing programs were asked to report their patient care hours in facilities other than acute-care hospitals. These facilities include long-term care, residential facilities, assisted living, surgi-centers and other types of facilities that care for residents or patients. The highest proportion of patient care experiences in these types of facilities occurs in LPN programs. LPN programs average 61 (range 56-66) hours of basic medical surgical nursing in these settings. Associate degree nursing programs also used these facilities for geriatric experiences (mean 46 hours, range 0-152) and basic medical-surgical (mean 32 hours, range 0-96). Two associate degree programs utilized these facilities for psych/mental health, one program used them for pediatrics and one program used them for community health. No associate degree nursing program reported using them for preceptorship. Baccalaureate programs reported little usage of these types of facilities with the largest area of usage being geriatric (mean 16, range 0-60). Non-acute care facilities were utilized by two programs for basic medical surgical nursing, one program for psych/mental health and one program for preceptorship.



COMMUNITY BASED PATIENT CARE HOURS

Patient care experiences in community setting such as clinics, client homes, physician offices, and schools occurred most frequently in baccalaureate nursing programs. Only one LPN program reported offering a community patient care experience (12 hours in pediatrics). Both associate degree and baccalaureate programs had the majority of

community based patient care experiences in the area of community health. Baccalaureate programs average 132 (range 76-190) hours in community health versus an average of 28 (range 0-120) hours in associate degree programs. Baccalaureate nursing programs also utilized community settings for basic medical surgical (range 0-90; mean 31), followed by psych/mental health (range 0-56; mean 17) and pediatrics (range 0-35; mean 13). Associate degree nursing programs utilized community settings for pediatrics (range 0-40; mean 16), psych mental health (range 0-60; mean 13), and basic medical-surgical (range 0-96; mean 12).



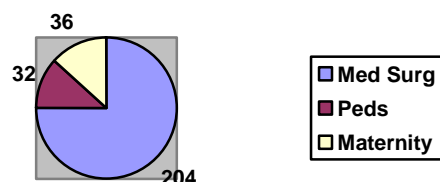
HOURS SPENT IN EACH NURSING SPECIALTY

The data were further analyzed to determine the number of patient care hours for each type of program in each identified specialty area.

PRACTICAL NURSING PROGRAMS

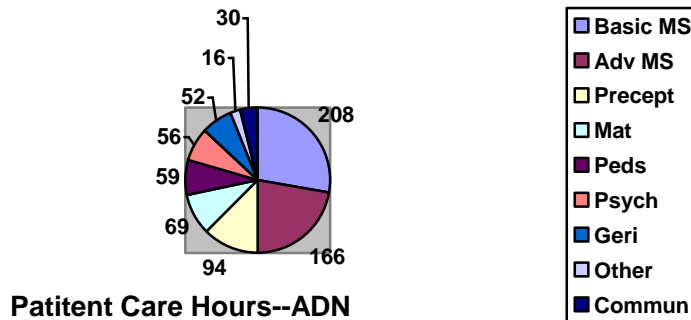
All practical nursing programs provided experiences in three of the specialty areas: basic medical surgical, pediatric, and maternity. The majority of patient care hours were in basic medical surgical with a mean of 204 and a range of 152-240. Only one practical nursing program reported geriatric patient care hours (range 0-66; mean 22). . Since a large proportion of LPNs work in long-term care, it is surprising to find very few clinical hours in this setting. This may be due to the fact that CNA preparation is required by most LPN programs as a condition of admission. Faculty may have determined that sufficient geriatric experiences were obtained during the CNA course to meet program goals. All LPN programs provided maternity clinical hours (range 32-40; mean 36) and pediatric clinical hours (range 28-36; mean 32). No other specialty areas were reported.

Mean Patient Care Hours LPN



ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING PROGRAMS

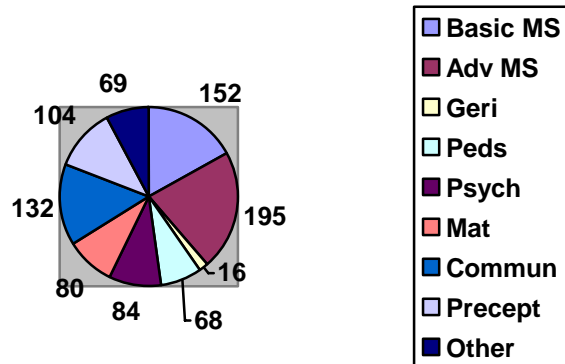
Associate degree nursing programs as a group reported patient care hours in all areas measured. Some individual programs did not report hours in some specialty areas. Programs that did not report any patient care hours required in Board rules (n=2) were asked to provide an explanation of where their students obtain these experiences. One program reported that 20 hours of outpatient psych-mental health nursing was included in the community health category. The other program reported that pediatric hours were included in the maternity and medical-surgical hours but had changed to utilize more community settings to obtain pediatric experiences. Both programs are located in rural areas of the state that lack acute care units in these specialties. The largest portion of clinical hours in associate degree nursing programs is in the basic medical-surgical area with a range of 70-384 and a mean of 208. Patient care hours in the other areas include: advanced medical-surgical (range: 0-384; mean 166), preceptorship (range 0-480; mean 94); maternity (range 24-110; mean 69), pediatrics (range: 0-104; mean 59), psych-mental health (range 0-108; mean 56), geriatric (range 0-152; mean 52) and community (range 0-120; mean 30).



BACCALAUREATE NURSING PROGRAMS

Baccalaureate programs as a group reported patient care hours in all categories. No areas required by rules lacked patient care hours in any program. The largest amount of clinical hours were in advanced medical surgical (range 60-476; mean 195). Other areas include: basic medical surgical (range 60-336; mean 152), community health (range 76-178; mean 132), preceptorship (range 0-190; mean 104), psych-mental health (range 45-128; mean 84), maternity (range 45-118; mean 80); "other" (range 0-164; mean 69); pediatric (range 35-108; mean 68) and geriatric (range 0-60; mean 16).

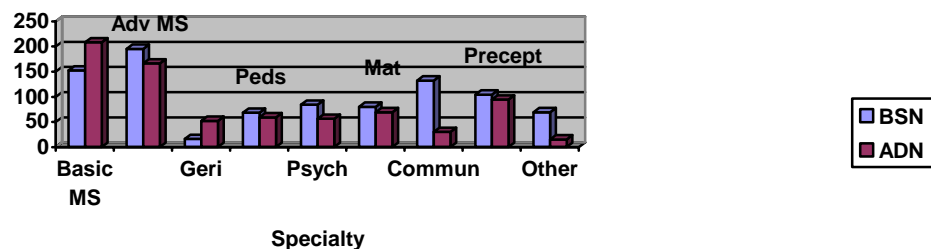
Patient Care Hours BSN



RN PROGRAM COMPARASON

Differences in patient care hours between associate degree and baccalaureate programs are illustrated in the following graph.

Hours in Specilaty Area BSN and ADN



It appears that BSN programs provide more patient care hours in all specialty areas except basic medical surgical and geriatrics. Larger variances are seen in the category of community and “other”. The inherent nature of a baccalaureate program includes formal community health coursework, in contrast to an associate degree nursing program which focuses more on acute care experience. The large variance in the “other” category may reflect the diverse and creative opportunities available to BSN students as clinical time is spent in non-traditional health care settings such as health fairs and day care centers.

SUMMARY

The rapid expansion of nursing programs in Arizona has led to increased placements of nursing students in clinical areas. Both nursing programs and clinical facilities have reported shortages of available placements for pre-licensure students. Data gathered by the Arizona State Board of Nursing to identify patient care hours required by nursing programs revealed that the majority of clinical hours occur in acute care settings. There is variability in the usage of non-acute care settings in most specialties. LPN programs consistently use non-acute settings for basic medical surgical nursing and baccalaureate programs consistently use community settings for community health. No other areas of consistent use of non-acute care facilities were identified. The variability of usage of non-acute care settings may be due to the program’s location combined with a scarcity of acute-care opportunities in some specialties. Programs are encouraged to continue to

make the best use of patient care experiences for their students and carefully determine the most appropriate setting for clinical experiences in each specialty area.

Special thanks to all nursing program directors, deans, chairs, and faculty members in Arizona who provided data for this report and to Karen Gilliland for preparing the Excel charts and organizing the data.